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ABSTRACT

Developed for a workplace literacy program by educators from the Emily Griffith Opportunity School, this teacher's guide presents a 4-hour memo-writing workshop to introduce participants to the writing process. The guide is organized in two sections. The first section covers prewriting, freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering; the second section covers paragraphs, first drafts, memos, revision, editing, and final draft and evaluation. Sections include an objective, activities, and practice. (KC)

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ED 378 438

A MEMO WRITING WORKSHOP

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March 15, 1994

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A MEMO WRITING WORKSHOP

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John Cleary

March 15, 1994

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKPLACE LITERACY PROJECT

This module was developed by educators from Emily Griffith Opportunity School as part of a National Workplace Education grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A cooperative effort between the business and education communities, the program was designed specifically to enhance employees' literacy skills.

Direct benefits to the workforce include improved morale and motivation, self-esteem, team work, and promotional opportunities.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our partners. In addition we recognize all of the students who participated in classes and who provided us with invaluable feedback for strengthening future classes.

We hope partnerships such as these will provide the catalyst for developing new or continued on-site educational opportunities.

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INTRODUCTION

Most people believe writing to be difficult; oftentimes it is. Frequently we're not sure what to say or how to say it -- or even where to begin. Yet, most people spend at least *some* time writing on the job. For example, we often need to write telephone messages, instructions for next shift personnel, memos, and reports, etc.

This 4-hour *Memo Writing Workshop* will introduce participants to the **writing process**, and is designed for *anyone* who wants to improve his or her writing.

Although this is not an advanced class, it is assumed that participants will be familiar with certain areas before attending this workshop. These areas are basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

STEP 1: PREWRITING

OBJECTIVE: To introduce rules of freewriting, brainstorming, and organizing as well as purpose and audience

ACTIVITIES:

1. Freewriting exercises
2. Discussion regarding writing purpose and audience
3. Model brainstorming and clustering
4. Practice clustering ideas generated in brainstorming
5. Discuss and practice choosing topics

FREEWRITING

One way to conquer writing anxiety and to get started writing is to "freewrite." Freewriting is simply writing privately for a few minutes about anything that crosses your mind. When you freewrite, keep in your mind the following:

- Be creative
- Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation
- Don't worry about making sense; your writing isn't going to be shared with anyone
- If you draw a blank, then write, "I'm drawing a blank" and keep going.
- Just do it!

PRACTICE

Directions: Freewrite for ten minutes.

You can write about anything you want, or you can try these ideas:

- Your family
- Freedom
- Your divorce (try not to be too negative)
- Your favorite holiday
- What you had to eat last night
- A movie
- Exercise
- Your job
- God
- Your future

PURPOSE

When you write for a purpose, ask yourself "Why am I writing this?" Usually, we write for one of the following purposes:

To inform

May give information, explain something, or define the meaning of something

To tell a story

Tells a series of events

To describe

Describes something in detail

To persuade

To support an opinion or to persuade the reader to do something

IMPORTANT: Will the reader know the main purpose of your writing?

AUDIENCE

"Audience" means the person(s) who is reading your writing.

Who is your reader?

What does the reader know about the subject?

Do you need to research the reader's knowledge and attitude about the subject?

IMPORTANT: KNOW YOUR READER

WHAT IS YOUR TOPIC?

"Topic" means the main idea of your writing.

Topics can be chosen

Topics shouldn't be too broad or too narrow

Choose a topic you already know about

PRACTICE

In the following exercise you will be given a subject, an audience, and a purpose. Then you will be asked to produce two topic ideas about them.

1. The subject is your job, and the purpose is to inform your audience of the two most important things about your job.

Topic 1. _____

Topic 2. _____

2. The subject is a new cleaning solution you have discovered that will reduce the time required for cleaning each ward. The purpose is to persuade your supervisor to change to the new cleaner.

Topic 1. _____

Topic 2. _____

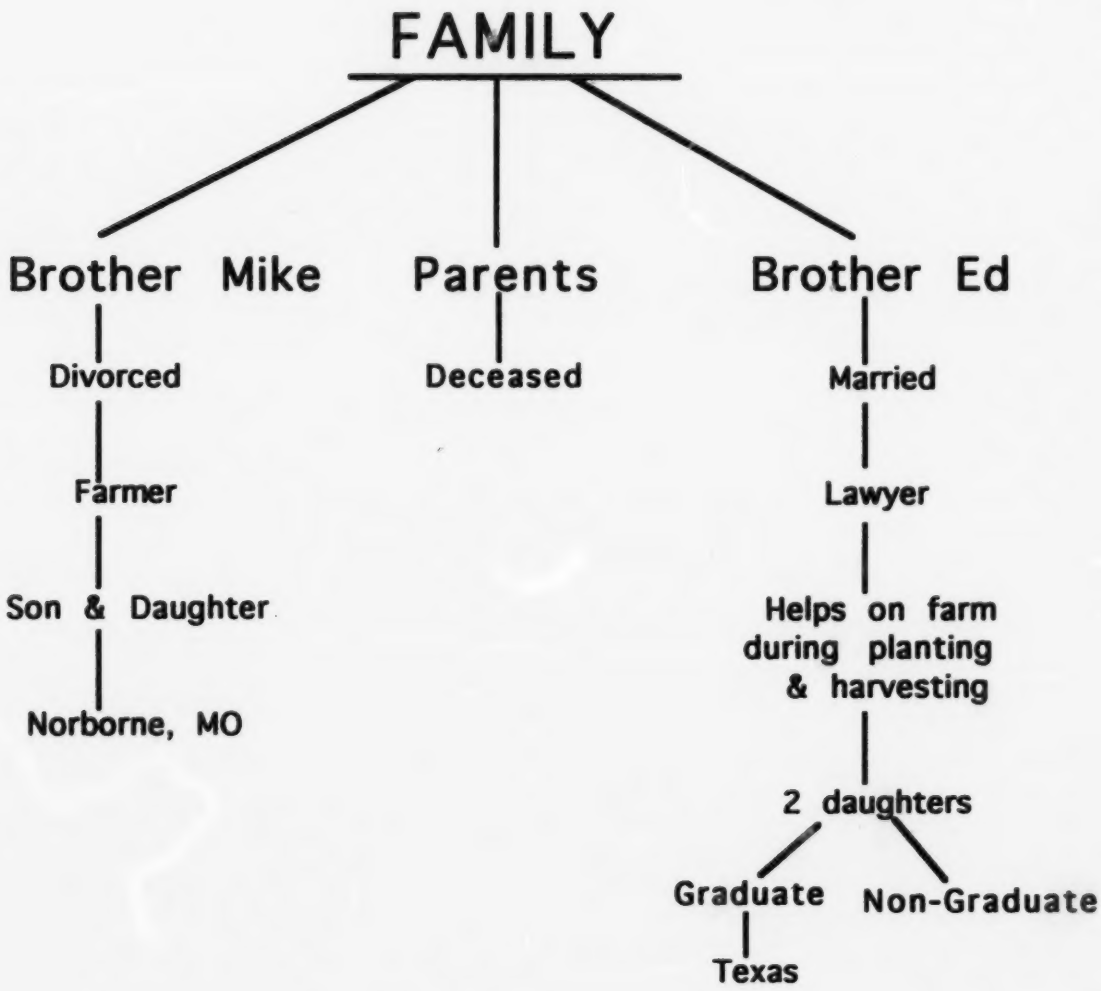
3. The subject is a new safety procedure concerning the handling of HIV-contaminated materials. The purpose is to describe to an audience of environmental workers the new process for handling these materials.

Topic 1. _____

Topic 2. _____

The following three techniques may be used to move from the brainstorming stage to organizing stage. Choose the technique that feels best to you.

TECHNIQUE 1: TREEING



TECHNIQUE 2: OUTLINING

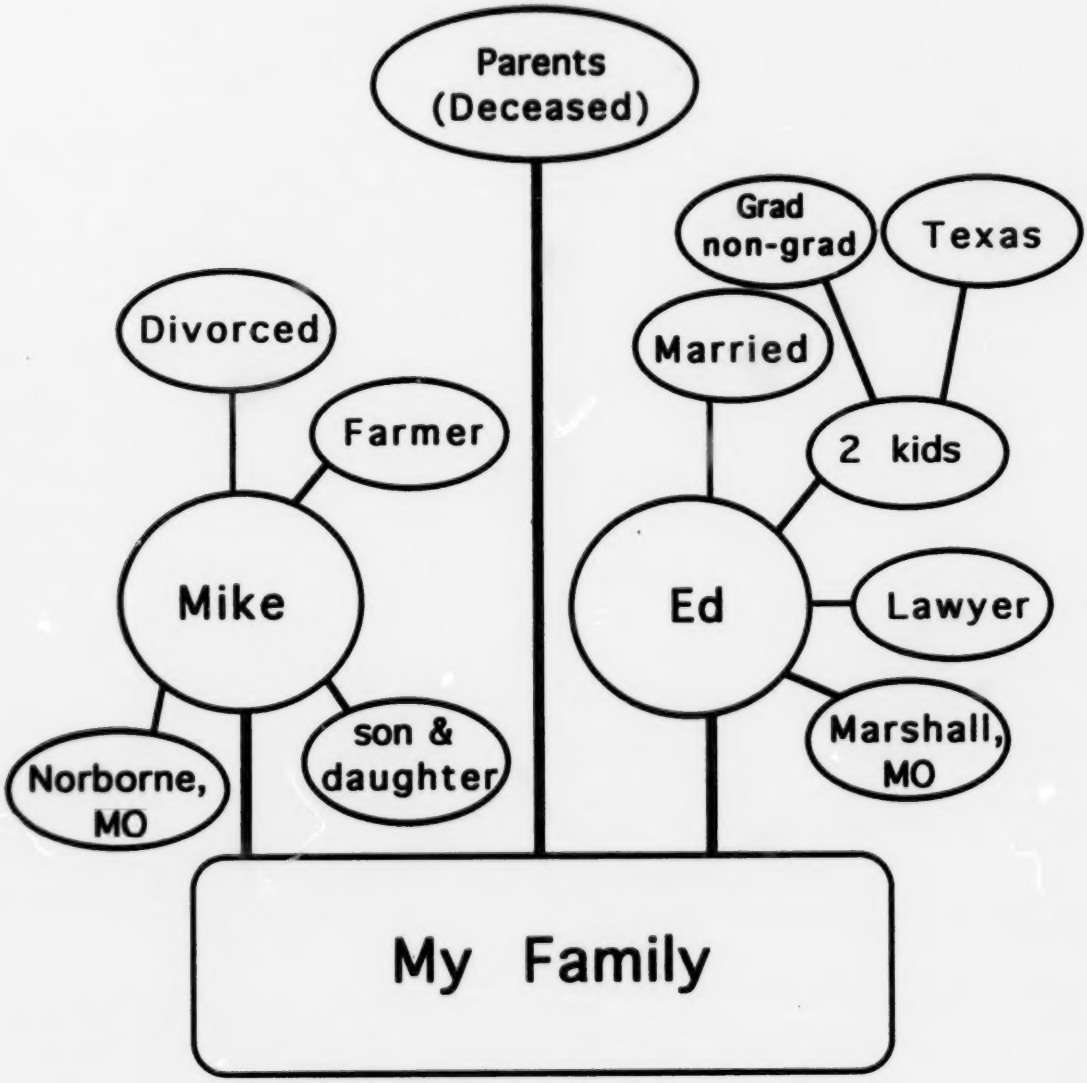
SUBJECT: My family

1. Brother Ed
   - A. Married
   - B. Lawyer
   - C. 2 Daughters
     - (1) 1 graduated, lives in Texas
     - (2) 1 graduates in June, 1994
   - D. Helps brother on farm
     - (1) During planting and harvesting
   - E. Marshall, Missouri

2. Brother Mike
   - A. Divorced
   - B. Farmer
   - C. Son & Daughter
   - D. Norborne, Missouri

3. Parents
   - A. Deceased

TECHNIQUE 3: CLUSTERING OR MIND MAPPING



BRAINSTORMING

After your purpose, audience, and topic are clear in your mind, you are ready to generate ideas about your topic. To help you get started, ask yourself the following questions:

What interests you about this topic?
What do you already know about it?
Will you need to do research about the topic?
Ask yourself questions such as Who? What? Where? How? When? Why?

Visualize the subject, and write down any sights, thoughts, smells, likes, dislikes, etc., that enter your mind.

RULES OF BRAINSTORMING

Anything goes
No complete sentences
Use trigger words such as
(Who, what, when, where, why, sights, smells, sounds, ideas, likes, dislikes)
Look up and visualize the subject
Write everything down; don't judge or reject anything
It's not a final product

PRACTICE

BRAINSTORMING FOR IDEAS

In this exercise, write down 5 topics you know something about. Make it your first 5 thoughts (unless they're dirty). Just make a list!

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Choose one of the above ideas, and put it on a separate piece of paper. Otherwise, choose one of the subjects below and write down all the ideas that come to mind. (Don't judge, just write!)

From previous list or

1. God
2. Your job
3. Women in the military
4. Your family
5. Your pet

CLUSTERING

Clustering or mind mapping comes from a freewriting approach. It can be broken into 5 steps or chunks. As with brainstorming and freewriting, don't worry about grammar, spelling, punctuation, making sense, or complete sentences. Just follow the model as if it were a map and you will get where you want to be.

STEPS USED IN CLUSTERING

TEACHING NOTES: The instructor first demonstrates the steps used in clustering, then participants are asked to repeat the same steps.

Step 1: Draw a circle in the middle of an empty page. Write the topic or subject inside the topic.

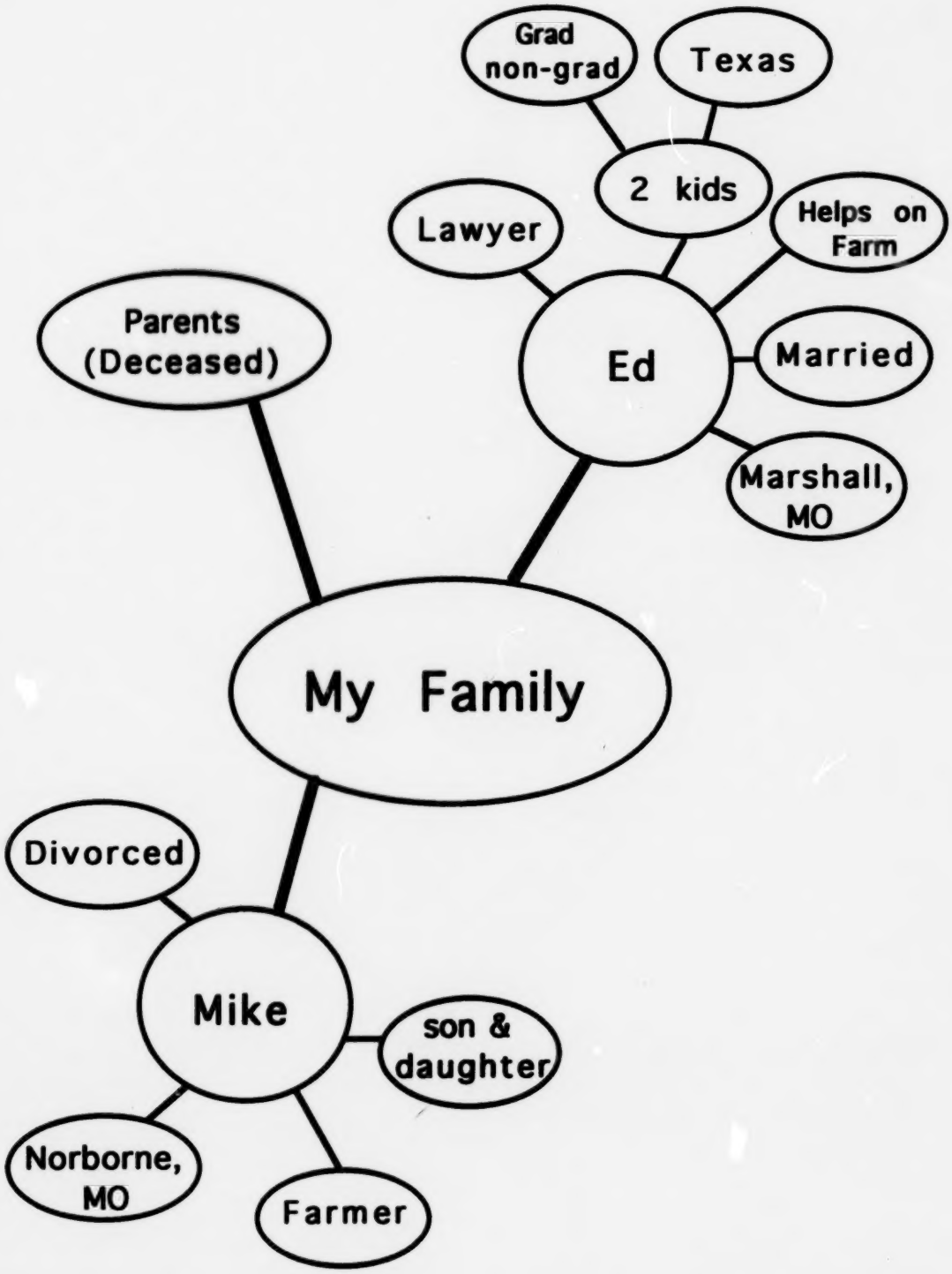
Step 2: As you think or talk about the topic or subject inside the circle, draw other circles and add ideas, descriptions, or anything else you can think of. Connect these other circles with lines.

Remember:

* Don't be judgmental
* There are no bad ideas
* You will edit unnecessary ideas later
* Do not use complete sentences

SECTION I

SAMPLE OF CLUSTERING



Step 3: Move from circles to sentences

For example:

My mother is dead.
My father is dead.
My brother Mike lives in Norborne, Missouri.
He is a farmer.
He is divorced.
He has a daughter.
He has a son.

My brother Ed lives in Marshall, Missouri.
He is married.
He is a lawyer.
He has two daughters.
Katie has graduated from college.
She lives in Texas.
Molly will graduate in June.
Ed helps Mike on the farm during planting and harvesting.

Step 4: Connect the sentences. Add descriptive words.

Hint: *And, or, but* are three commonly used connecting words.

For Example:

My brother Mike is a farmer, and he lives in a small town called Norborne, Missouri.
He is divorced and has a son and a daughter.
My brother Ed is a lawyer.
He is married and he and his wife have two daughters.
Katie has graduated from college and lives and works in Texas.
Molly will graduate in June.
Ed and Mike both like to work on the farm.

PRACTICE

You have seen the steps involved in clustering; now it is your turn to follow the same steps.

Write about your family using the clustering strategy.

SECTION II

OBJECTIVE: To move from generating ideas, to organizing ideas, to writing a first draft; to review the parts of a paragraph; to define a memo, introduce the parts of a memo, and discuss some reasons for writing a memo

ACTIVITIES:

1. Use a cluster map to produce a paragraph or paragraphs about the your family
2. Define and discuss the parts of a memo and the acronym KISS (p.20)
3. Discuss reasons for writing memos
4. Learn the proper memo form
5. Practice organizing memos

SECTION II

PARAGRAPHS

A Paragraph is a series of related sentences developing one topic, idea, or central point.

The Topic Sentence gives a general overview of what the rest of the paragraph will say. It is usually the first sentence and it is always a complete sentence.

Supporting Sentences contain details that explain or clarify the topic sentence. The supporting sentences should verify the writer's point and be relevant.

STEP 2: FIRST DRAFT

You have now produced some sentences from your cluster map about your family. Take the sentences and form a paragraph or paragraphs. For example:

My Family

I'd like to tell you about my two brothers who live in Missouri.

My brother Mike is a farmer and lives in a small town called Norborne, Missouri. He is divorced and has a son in college and a daughter who styles hair.

My brother Ed is a lawyer and lives in Marshall, Missouri with his wife and two daughters. Katie, the oldest, graduated from college and moved to Texas. Molly will graduate in June.

I hope to see, call, or write them soon.

Now take your sentences and produce a paragraph(s).

MEMOS

Memos come in all shapes, sizes, and styles and are generally used for in-house communication. They are usually short and focused. These types of writing decisions, of course, depend on the writer's relationship with the reader.

Keep the following acronym in mind when you write.

Keep

It

Simple,

Stupid

REASONS FOR WRITING MEMOS

- to announce
- to remind
- to record phone messages
- to request
- to commend or congratulate
- to report
- to confirm

Write down any reasons or topics you may have for writing memos on your job. Be specific.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

SECTION II

PARTS OF A MEMO

MEMO	(title)
	(double space)
To:	Name of the person(s) receiving it
	(double space)
From:	Name of the person(s) writing it
	(double space)
Date:	When the person writes it.
	(double space)
Subject or: RE*	Purpose of the memo
	(double space)

The message is single spaced and block or indented style may be used.

(*RE means Regarding)

SECTION II

STEP 3: REVISION

OBJECTIVE: To learn the revision checklist; to produce a first draft of a memo, and to apply the revision checklist to it

ACTIVITIES:

1. To understand the revision process and to learn the revision checklist
2. To apply the revision checklist to a sample memo
3. To examine redundancy and wordiness and practice how to avoid them

REVISION

Revision is the third step in the writing process. Here you check your work to see if it's "a good read."

Here are some questions that you can ask as you revise your memo and help you determine if it is a good read.

Is your memo appropriately formatted?

Does your memo achieve its purpose?
Hint: Do you get your point across?

Is the memo "right" for your audience?
Hint: Is your word choice appropriate for your readers?

Is the memo organized in a logical manner?
Hint: Can the reader follow your thoughts easily?

Are there sufficient details to develop the main idea?
Hint: Are you specific?

Does your memo look good?
Hints:
Are your paragraphs evenly spaced?
Is there adequate white space?
Are your paragraphs blocked or indented consistently?

In short, is it "a good read?"

PRACTICE

WORDINESS AND REDUNDANCY

Wordiness means too much or unnecessary information.

Redundancy means needless repetition of words.

Look at the following sentences for redundancy and wordiness.

EXAMPLES:

Poor - The sport of baseball dominates television during the World Series.

Better - Baseball dominates television during the World Series.

Poor - I'll call you up when the meeting starts.

Better - I'll call you when the meeting starts.

Poor - The accident occurred during the time frame in which the class was held.

Better - The accident occurred while the class was held.

PRACTICE

Find examples of wordiness and/or redundancy and make appropriate changes.

1. Each and every Environmental Services employee got a raise.

2. Many mistakes have been eliminated entirely because of Total Quality Management Training.

3. The cafeteria claims prompt and speedy service.

4. We should resort back to our old cleaning fluid because this one didn't work.

5. We'll have a party when the new wing of the hospital is brought to its final conclusion.

6. Everyone will have their GED when the Basic Skills Class is completely finished.

7. The staff sees really sick patients without further delay.

8. The class was canceled in view of absenteeism.

9. Enclosed is my check for the amount of $2000.

10. Dr. Smith thinks he is the one and only person in the Emergency Room.

SECTION II

PRACTICE

Read the following sample memo and revise it using the Revision Checklist.

MEMO

Date: February 1, 1994

To: Wilma Carter, Nursing Supervisor, Ward 3E

From: Juan Olson, Director of Nursing

Subject: Patient records of Kathleen Jones.

I need the complete charts on Ms. Kathleen Jones for the entire and complete time she was your patient here. This must include in-take notes and diagnosis, treatment plan, and discharge evaluation. I need this basic fundamental information for the Quality Assessment Report.

I also would like a one page written up progress report, which will include your personal opinion on whether we found out what was wrong with her, did we treat it, and did she have adequate home support prior to the time she was discharged. In short, did we do our job?

Please turn in all requested data by February 15, 1994 to my mail box in the Personnel Department. if you have any questions about any of this, please feel free to call me at 887-7762.

REVISION CHECKLIST

If you can answer "yes" to each of the following questions, put a check mark next to the sentence.

____ 1. Is your memo appropriately formatted.

____ 2. Does the memo achieve its purpose? (Do you get your point across?)

____ 3. Is the memo "right" for your audience? (Is your word choice appropriate for your readers?)

____ 4. Is the memo organized in a logical manner? (Can the reader follow your thoughts easily?)

____ 5. Are there sufficient details to develop the main idea? (Are you specific?)

____ 6. Does your memo look good? (Are your paragraphs evenly spaced? Is there adequate white space? Are paragraphs blocked or indented consistently?)

____ 7. In short, is it a good "read?"

If you answered "no" to any of the above, you'll need to go back and make changes.

SECTION II

PRACTICE

Choose one topic from the list below or a topic of your own and write a memo. Use the steps in the writing process and the revision checklist.

1. A "Request" Memo
2. An "Informational" Memo
3. An "Announcement" Memo

"Request" Memo

Write a memo in which you ask to attend a Total Quality Management (TQM) training workshop. You want to get up-to-date information on TQM and you ask to attend the workshop and to be reimbursed for your expenses.

Hints:
1. Make the request at once
2. Describe the workshop and its benefits
3. State the approximate cost
4. Justify your attendance

"Announcement" Memo

Write a memo in which you announce the time and place of the March Nutritional Services Awards Banquet.

Hints:
1. Make the announcement immediately
2. Emphasize the importance of recognizing good employees
3. Ask for attendance from all employees

PRACTICE (cont'd)

"Informational" Memo

Write a memo in which you inform the hospital newsletter that a co-worker has passed her GED tests.

Hints:

1. State the topic immediately
2. Give all pertinent information (who, what, where, when, why)
3. Congratulate

SECTION II

[redacted]

OBJECTIVE: To learn the mechanics of sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

ACTIVITIES:

1. To determine correct sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization
2. To edit the memo rough draft by using the "Editing Checklist"
3. To practice editing by working individually and in pairs

EDITING

Editing is your next step in the **writing process**. Here, you polish your words by correcting the *mechanics*.

Mechanics means ...

- Sentence Structure
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Capitalization

REMINDER It's important that you correct only one of the above areas at a time!

Why? Editing can get discouraging if you're looking for **all** the different areas of mechanics at one time!

Here are some questions that you can ask yourself as you begin to edit your paper ...

EDITING

Sentence Structure:

Question: Are all my sentences complete?

Incorrect: Because tomorrow is a holiday.

This is an **incomplete sentence** because

1. There is no subject and predicate (verb)
2. It doesn't make sense.

Correct: I'm sleeping in because tomorrow is a holiday.

This is a **complete sentence**.

H I N T: If you can say **"so what?"** to the "sentence" in question, chances are you have an incomplete sentence. In other words, it doesn't make sense by itself (as in the first example above).

EDITING (cont'd)

Sentence Structure (cont'd):

Question: Do my verbs "agree" with my subject?

Incorrect: Each of us have the day off.
"Each" -- the **subject** of the sentence -- does not agree with "have" -- the **predicate** of the sentence.

Correct: Each of us has the day off.
"Each" agrees with "has."

H I N T:

* Find the subject of the sentence first (the person, place, or thing doing or receiving the action).

* Then, using that subject, ask yourself "does or is what?" (In the above example, you would say "Each does what?" Answer: "Each has" -- not "have" -- "the day off").

EDITING (cont'd)

Spelling:

Question: Which words do you think are misspelled?
Circle them.

H I N T:
- Try to spell the word(s) again.
- Use a dictionary.
- Ask someone for help.

Remember:

Even if you use a computer to write your memos, don't depend on "Spell Check" to locate your misspellings. Although Spell Check is a handy feature, it will not pick up homonyms such as *they're, their, there*!

The writer is the person responsible for his writing!

EDITING (cont'd)

Punctuation:

Question: Do I have an **"end mark"** at the end of each sentence?

Incorrect: Please call me if you have any questions
(Period was omitted at the end of the sentence).

Correct: Please call me if you I have any questions.

H I N T: End marks are **period (.), question mark (?), and exclamation point(!).**

EDITING (cont'd)

Capitalization:

Question: Do all of my sentences begin with a capital letter?

Incorrect: the meeting will be held in the conference room. (The first word of the sentence was not capitalized).

Correct: The meeting will be held in the conference room.

*** H I N T *** Go over each sentence carefully -- it's easy to miss those first letters.

EDITING (cont'd)

Question: Are all of the proper names and places I've used capitalized?

Incorrect: Bill young will be transferred to the midwest.

(Bill's last name and the region were not capitalized.)

H I N T:

* Capitalize a person's name or a specific name of a church, hospital, business, etc.

* Capitalize the names of specific regions, (the South, the Midwest) not locations -- as in "He lives in east Denver."

EDITING PRACTICE

Participants will show their understanding of the *editing* step by finding and correcting usage, misspelling, and capitalization errors.

By yourself, use the same memo you chose for your first draft, and then edit it. To review the areas you're going to concentrate on, use the "Editing Checklist on the next page.

When you're finished, pick a partner, exchange papers, and edit his or her memo.

With your partner, discuss the errors you found in each other's memos.

Individually, rewrite your memos -- error free!

EDITING CHECKLIST

If you can answer "yes" to each of the following questions, put a check mark next to the sentence.

_____ 1. Are all of your sentences complete?

Hint: They have a subject and a predicate (verb) AND they make sense.

_____ 2. Do your subjects and predicates agree?

_____ 3. Do you have any misspellings?

Hint: Circle the words you even *think* might be misspelled. Correct them.

_____ 4. Does every sentence begin with a capital letter?

Hint: How about names of people, places, etc.?

If you answered "no" to any of the above, you'll need to go back and make changes.

FINAL DRAFT AND EVALUATION

OBJECTIVE: To produce an error-free final draft

ACTIVITIES:

1. Write a final draft
2. Complete an evaluation
3. Party time